# EFFECT OF GENDER AND SCHOOL LOCATION ON SECONDARY SCHOOL

# STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENT ENGLISH VOCABULARY IN JUNIOR SECONDARY

# SCHOOLS IN AKOKA SOUTH EDUCATION ZONE ONDO STATE

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of gender and school location on students' achievement in English vocabulary in junior secondary schools in Akoko South Education Zone, Ondo State. Two research questions were posed and two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The design of the study was non-equivalent pretest, post-test control group quasi-experimental research design. Purposive random sampling was used to select two schools for the study. The two intact classes (rural and urban schools) randomly selected were subject to treatment. The urban schools comprised 86 male and female students while the rural schools comprised 74 male and female students. The instrument was face validated by three experts the from department of Arts Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The results of the study showed that: Gender had significant effect on students' achievement in English vocabulary. Also, school location had significant effect on students' achievement in English language vocabulary. Based on these findings, it was concluded that the study provided empirical evidence of the effects of gender and school location in enhancing students' achievement in English language vocabulary. It was therefore, recommended amongst others that teachers, school administrators and stakeholders should make learning environment conducive and give equal learning opportunities to both male and female students.

**KEYWORDS:** Language, English Language, Vocabulary, Gender and School Location

## INTRODUCTION

Language is an integral part of communication. Language as a means of communication plays many important roles among human beings in their day-to-day interactions and communications. Onyekwere, Chibueze, Roscolette, Matins and Quinette (2012), language is human specific. It is exclusive to human beings. Although animals communicate, their communication is not language. Language is specific to human beings because it is used to carry out series of functions among human beings and can only be learned by human beings. There are some theories that underline how language can be acquired or learned. These theories were developed to account for language acquisition and learning. Some of them include behaviourist-"say it after me", mentalist- "it is all in your mind", connectionist- "it is associative", interactionist- "linguistic environment interacting with innate capacity", among others.

Consequently, after the acquisition of learning, humans use language voluntarily to convey information, to influence others, to keep records, to document some ideas, to express themselves and to interact for phatic communication. Basically, language affects human endeavours and manifests itself in every facet of human life and activity (Fawehnmi, 2007). As a result of this, various language policies have been made in Nigeria with regards to medium of

instructions in our various institutions of learning. Nevertheless, because of multilingual nature of Nigeria and disparities among the major languages, the (2004) Language policy on Education assigned the status of official language to English language is the language of science, technology, medicine, religion, communication, politics, education, trade and commerce. It is therefore, expected of every student to be competent and proficient in English language usage. One of the underlying objectives of teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria is; to make student speak at normal speed with good pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation and to ensure high level of English language skills (Enaibe & Imonivwerha, 2007). Learners' competence and proficiency in the English language is determined by vocabulary because it constitutes the knowledge of words possessed by individual learners. Edge (1993), states that, knowing a lot of words in a target language is very important. The more words we know, the better our chance of understanding or making ourselves understood.

Most often, speaking and writing in the target language is a complex-task. Internalizing chunks of vocabulary necessary for communication may be time consuming and demanding. Teaching English vocabulary in the junior secondary school should be encompassing and different from adults' learning method. The teacher should make use of flash cards, vocabulary drills, language games, reading comprehension exercises, oral exercise and repetition to help the students develop the four language skills in the target language. The teacher must play important roles by motivating the students' learning interest. According to Harmer (2001, p. 38) "young learners especially those up to the ages of nine to twelve learn differently from older learners, adolescents and adults. They easily get bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so". This view is also stressed by Diego (2010), in his study on learning vocabulary through total physical response observes that vocabulary learning is one of the most complex but important area when teaching English. It is the area of language learning needed to be taught on regular basis. However, one of the aims of teaching English vocabulary at junior secondary school level is to make students understand simple idiomatic expressions while communicating with native and non-native speakers of English language. Therefore, to realize this aim, the areas such as common prefixes and suffices, plurals, parts of speech, word recognition, root of words and homonyms should be given adequate attention by the teacher.

In spite of this aim, students' achievement in English language is worrisome. For instance, the (West African Examination Council) (WAEC) Chief Examiners' reports (2008, 2009 & 2010) stated that students' performance was generally poor. Inadequate vocabulary to restate the ideas in the passage briefly in their own expression despite the use of vocabulary suitable to the students' level of understanding was another area of poor performance in the two comprehension passages. They lack adequate vocabulary to restate the ideas in the passages briefly using their own expressions. It is, however, exigent to find the factors responsible for the students' poor academic achievement in English language.

Many factors can be responsible for students' poor academic achievement. These factors could be gender and learning environment (school location). Gender plays prominent roles in language. Gender is an important concept in language teaching and learning. It has been emphasized to have effect on students' academic achievement. Umo (2001), opines that, gender is very important to determine whether male students do better than female students in language learning. Jadesola (2002), opines that, gender is socially constructed for the purpose of allocating powers, duties, responsibilities, status, roles in any social context. Gender is the disparity observable between male and female in terms of power, position and achievement in a particular context or field of study. Similarly, Umoh (2001), further defines gender as a psychological term need in describing behaviour and attributes expected of individuals on the basis of being born of

either male or female. In a nutshell, gender is behavior and characteristics that bring about the differences between male and female.

As gender is an issue with important pedagogical implications in second language teaching and learning, it has received some important attentions in second language teaching. Umback (2004), opines that female students are likely better than their male counterparts to value and use effective educational practices. This, therefore, helps to place emphasis on students' academic challenge and enriching their educational experience. Lynn (2004), states that male students have larger brain size than their female counterparts. Therefore, male students would be expected to have higher average performance in picture vocabulary than their female counterparts. However, Whitney (2006), stresses that female students outperform male students in almost all indices of achievement related to language skills. Also, Akabogu (2002), supports that female students perform better than their male counterparts in the production of some words indifferent languages. In the same vein, Azikiwe (2005), notes that, there is a general belief that females are better than males in language use. Azikiwe stresses further that this assumption has been supported with evidence by very many foreign researchers. This shows the existing differences in language achievement between males and females due to gender.

Based on the different views of different scholars on the issue of gender in language teaching and learning, it is important to state that English language occupies important position in Nigeria education system. In the same vein, vocabulary is an important area of the English language. Due to this, the teaching and learning of vocabulary should be given serious and adequate attention by the teachers. In line with his, the students in this study were subject to treatment to determine the effect of gender on their academic achievement. Therefore, effect of gender on students' academic achievement is an important variable in this study.

Closely related to gender variable is school location. As a result of its importance in language teaching and learning, literatures on the effect of school location on students' academic achievement abound. Different scholars in the field of language have come out with different views containing a low variety of social amenities and has isolated environment. In other words, school location can be in rural areas where facilities such as qualified teachers, laboratories, conducive learning environment and social amenities are not available. It can also be in urban areas where qualified teachers, laboratories, conducive learning environment and social amenities are available. However, location in this context refers to the geographical position of the school which can be rural or urban areas. Nevertheless, the differences in rural and urban areas indicate the differences in the academic achievement of students in language learning.

Because location is an important issue in second language teaching and learning, it has received some important attention from different scholars based on their empirical studies in second language teaching and learning. Lackney (1994), stresses that, students in rural schools achieved better than students in urban schools. The researcher explained further that this could be attributed to the fact that in the rural schools, classes were not as large as those in urban schools. Also, Axtel and Bowers (1972), confirm that, students in rural areas perform significantly better than their urban counterparts in verbal aptitude, English language and total scores using the National Common Entrance as a base. However, Igbeyin (2002), states that, students in urban schools obtained higher scores than those in rural schools. This achievement could be as a result of conducive learning environment, qualified teachers, laboratories and social amenities. Nevertheless, these different views by different scholars have shown the existing differences in language achievement between schools in rural areas and those in urban areas. Thus, the research subjects were subject to treatment to determine the effect of school location on their academic achievement. Therefore, the effect of school location on students' academic

achievement is an important variable in this study. The problem of this study therefore, is: to find out the effects of gender and school location on students' achievement in English language vocabulary in Akoko South Education zone. The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of gender and location on students' achievement in English language vocabulary in Akoko South Education zone. The following research questions were answered in this study.

- What is the interaction effect of treatment and gender on students' mean achievement scores in English language vocabulary using TPR?

- What is the interaction effect of treatment and school location on students' mean achievement scores in English language vocabulary using TPR?

  The following null hypotheses, testable at 0.5 level of significance, were formulated to guide the study.

- There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on the mean achievement scores of male and female students taught English language vocabulary using TPR method.

- There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and school location on the mean achievement scores of students from rural and urban schools if taught English language vocabulary using TPR method.

## METHODS

The research design was quasi-experimental design. Pretest –posttest non-randomized group design was used. The study was conducted in Akoko South Education Zone of Ondo State. The population comprised three thousand eight hundred and ninety one (3,891) JSS II students in the zone. A sample of 160 students was used for this study. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique: simple random sampling was used to select the local government; purposive random sampling was used to select two schools from the local government (rural and urban). The two intact classes (male and female) randomly selected were subject to treatment using TPR to know the effects of gender and school location on their academic achievement. The instrument for data collection is English Vocabulary Achievement Test (EVAT) adapted by the researcher from Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination (JSSCE). It measured the achievement of the students before and after the treatment. The instrument made up of two sections. Section A required information on the personal data of the respondents such as gender, location and class while section B contained 25-item questionnaire on the English language vocabulary. English Vocabulary Achievement Test (EVAT) was subject to face validation and it was validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Kinder-Richardson's formula (K-20) by administering the questions to JSS II students who did not form part of the sample. It yielded a reliability index of 0.75; this was considered usable because it was high enough. The researcher trained the English language teachers, who served as research assistants, on the procedure of the treatment. The training included the purpose of the study, a rehearsal on how to conduct the study by the regular teachers of the schools in handling the two classes, and the procedures to administer the instrument before and after the treatment. The teaching was carried out by the regular English language teachers to avoid possible bias by the researcher. The treatment, however, lasted for four weeks. Hence, the data for this study were administered and collected by the regular English language teachers in the schools before and after the treatment. The research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

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## RESULTS

### Research Question One

What is the interaction effect of treatment and gender on students' mean achievement scores in English vocabulary using Total Physical Response Method?

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Achievement in English Vocabulary based on Treatment and Gender**

| Gender N | Pre Test $\overline{X}$ SD | Post-Test $\overline{X}$ SD | Mean Gain |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male 74 | 40.49 10.12 | 61.89 18.84 | 21.40 |
| Female 86 | 40.44 9.66 | 58.53 19.86 | 18.09 |

Table 1 shows that there is a mean gain score of 21.40 for the male students and 18.09 mean gain score for the female students. The above result shows that both male and female students benefitted from the treatment. However, male students had a higher mean achievement scores than their female counterparts. The significant difference in the mean scores was further determined by testing the null hypothesis.

### Hypothesis One

There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on the mean achievement scores of male and female students if taught English vocabulary using total physical response method.

**Table 2: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of Students' Achievement in English Vocabulary by Treatment and Gender**

| Sources of Variation | Sum of Square | Degree of Freedom | Means Square | F-Observed | Sig of P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected Model | 51392.996 | 7(df) | 7341.857 | 131.077 | .000 |
| Intercept | 3005.874 | 1 | 3005.874 | 53.665 | .000 |
| Pretest | 16293.475 | 1 | 16293.475 | 290.894 | .000 |
| Treatment & Gender | 347.989 | 1 | 347.989 | 6.213 | .014 |
| Treatment & location | 261.615 | 1 | 261.615 | 4.671 | .032 |
| Error | 8513.779 | 152 | 56.012 | | |
| Total | 637588.000 | 160 | | | |
| Corrected Total | 59906.775 | 159 | | | |

Table 2 shows that the F observed for the effect of gender on students' achievement in English language vocabulary through treatment is 6.213 with a significant level of .01. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This is because male students performed slightly better than their female counterparts, even though both of them benefitted from the teaching method. Hence, gender had significant effect on students' achievement in English language vocabulary.

### Research Question TWO

What is the interaction effect of treatment and location on students' mean achievement

### Based on Treatment and School Location

| Location N pretest $\overline{X}$ SD Post-test $\overline{X}$ SD Mean Gain |
|---|
| Urban 86 40.38 9.00 56.59 18.87 16.21 |
| Rural 74 40.67 11.68 68.25 18.35 27.58 |

The result presented in table 3 above shows that there is a mean gain score of 16.21 for the urban schools and 27.58 mean gain score for the rural schools. The above result shows that both urban and rural schools benefited from the treatment. However, the mean achievement scores of students from the rural schools are slightly higher than those of the students from the urban schools.

**Hypothesis Two**

There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and school location on the mean achievement scores of students from rural and urban schools if taught English vocabulary using total physical response method.

The data from table 2 shows that the F observed for the effect of school location on students' achievement in English vocabulary through treatment is 4.671 with a significant level of .03. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This is because students from rural schools performed slightly better than students' from urban school, even though both groups benefited from the teaching method. Hence, school location had significant effect on students' achievement in English language vocabulary.

## DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

The result of this study has shown that gender had a significant effect on students' achievement in English vocabulary. Male students had a greater mean achievement than their female counterparts. Thus the result show that both male and female students benefited from the treatment. This result agrees with the findings of Lynn (2004), and Uzoegwu (2004), which state that male students performed better than their female counterparts in English language. Hence, this could be attributed to their brain size and their better attitude towards academics. Lynn (2004), asserts that male students have larger brain size than female students and therefore, would be expected to have higher average achievement in picture vocabulary.

Finally, from the result of the present study, students from both locations achieved high mean score in the post-test, the score from the rural schools was higher than that of their counterparts from the urban schools. This could be attributed to their high level of academic preparation and their better attitude to work. Therefore, this result agrees with the study of Axtel and Bowers (1972), which states that rural schools performed significantly better than their urban counterparts in verbal aptitude, English language and total scores.

## CONCLUSIONS

The result of this study shows that gender had a significant effect on secondary school students' achievement in English vocabulary. Thus, the male students had a higher mean score than their female counter parts in the English vocabulary achievement test. Also, result of this study shows that school location had a significant effect on secondary school students' achievement in English vocabulary. Thus, students in rural schools had a higher mean score than their counterparts in urban schools in English language vocabulary achievement test.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made based on the results of the study.

- Teachers, school administrators and stakeholders in both urban and rural schools should make learning environment conducive for students.

- Teachers, school administrators and stakeholders should also give equal learning opportunities to male and female students.

- They should also encourage discipline and frown at laziness in order to ensure equal academic achievement for both students in rural and urban schools as well as male and female students.

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